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Some Antecedents of the Holocaust Denial Literature

by

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ABSTRACT: Hannah Arendt's statement concerning German colonies having been the fertile soil for what later became the Nazi elite is examined. The review of evidence from German South West Africa supports her claim. This paper argues that the colonial maladministration and the genocide of the Hereros also gave rise to what today is known as denial literature. Such antecedents illustrate the importance of both history and memory in trying to come to grips with contemporary phenomena.

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SOME ANTECEDENTS OF THE HOLOCAUST DENIAL LITERATURE.¹

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INTRODUCTION

Geoffrey Barraclough has argued “.... that the years between 1890, when Bismarck withdrew from the political scene, and 1961, when Kennedy took up office as President of the United States, were a watershed between two ages. it was then that the forces took shape which have molded the contemporary world.”³ In this perspective, it will be argued here that the roots of the rise of nazi Germany did not begin with Hitler, but must be looked for much earlier or, as Hannah Arendt wrote in 1951,

African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite. Here they had seen with their own eyes how peoples could be converted into races and how, simply by taking the initiative in this process, one might push one's own people into the position of the master race.⁴

¹ Paper to be presented at the XXXII Congress of the International Institute of Sociology on July 3-7, 1995 in Trieste, Italy.

² This paper has greatly benefitted from comments by Karin Björnson, Frank Chalk, Hubert Guindon, Henri Lustiger-Thaler, the discussions in the Concordia genocide workshop, and the unfailing cooperation of the Interlibrary Loan Department of the Concordia University Library.

³ Geoffrey Barraclough, An Introduction to Contemporary History (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 10.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951), p. 206.

Since then, a number of authors have debated this proposition; some of them have agreed with it⁵ and some of them have tried to refute it.⁶ This debate has become somewhat diffuse because some of these authors have misquoted Hannah Arendt in order to prove or disprove an assertion she never made. Thus, Helmuth Bley talks about the “seeds of totalitarianism”⁷ while Gann and Duignan find no link between “colonialism and the emergence of fascism”⁸ This kind of misquotation is taken to unusual lengths by Woodruff Smith who accuses Helmut Bley of accepting “...Hannah Arendt’s notion that colonialism was a precursor of twentieth-century totalitarianism”⁹ -- a statement that she never made, as far as I have been able to ascertain. Ludwig Helbig, without actually mentioning Hannah Arendt, argues that the methods of dealing with people, their legitimization through the ideas of a racist ideology, their grounding in laws

⁵ Helmut Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule 1894-1914, English edition translated, edited and prepared by Hugh Ridley (London: Heinemann, 1971 (1968)), p. 282. See also: Peter Schmitt-Egner, Kolonialismus und Faschismus: Eine Studie zur historischen und begrifflichen Genesis faschistischer Bewusstseinsformen am deutschen Beispiel (Giessen/Lollar: Verlag Andreas Achenbach, 1975); Helmuth Stoecker, ed., German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the Second World War, Trans. from the German by Bernd Zöllner (London: C. Hurst, and Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1986); and Ludwig Helbig, “Der Koloniale Frühfaschismus.” in Ein Land, eine Zukunft: Namibia auf dem Weg in die Unabhängigkeit, eds. Nangolo Mbumba, Helgard Patemann, Uazuvara Katjivena (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1988 (Ein terre des Hommes Buch)), pp. 102-118.

⁶ L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, The Rulers of German Africa 1884-1914 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. xii, 226-229.

⁷ Helmuth Bley, op. cit., p. 282.

⁸ Gann and Duignan, op. cit., Preface p. xii. However, on pp. 226-227 they write that “Arendt’s interpretation has some merit.”

⁹ Woodruff D. Smith, The German Colonial Empire (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 241.

and bureaucratic supervision proved to be a prelude to German fascist practices between 1939 and 1945.¹⁰ That these debates are still alive after all these years is shown by Volker Ullrich (in German)¹¹ and by Jon Swan (in English),¹² both of whom affirm not only that genocide occurred in German South West Africa, but also that it had links to the nazi's rule in Germany.

While Hannah Arendt's statement referred to Germany's "African colonial possessions", I shall limit my discussion to German South West Africa, as did Volker Ullrich and Jon Swan. The history of this colony and the arguments whether or not a genocide occurred there will be reviewed here only in a summary fashion.

The major purpose of this paper is to show that not only was South West Africa a "fertile soil" for the growth of the future nazi elite, but that it also spawned the rise of a literature that first denied the genocide of the Herero, and later the facticity of the Holocaust.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Over the centuries a few missionaries from several European countries had come to the South West African coast. In the nineteenth century German missionaries became predominant. Since 1842 the German Rhenish Missionary Society had established several settlements. They conducted extensive trade there and even before 1878 this Society had applied

¹⁰ Ludwig Helbig, op. cit.

¹¹ Volker Ullrich, "...deutsches Blut zu rächen!" Die Zeit No.3 (21. January 1994): 20.

¹² Jon Swan, "The Final Solution in South West Africa: The confrontation between Germans and native Africans had mortal consequences not only for blacks but, ultimately, for Europe's Jews," The Quarterly Journal of Military History (1991): 36-55.

several times for annexation of this area by Prussia.¹³ Already in 1870 they had established the “Rheinische Missions-Handels-AG” in order to finance their relatively important trade, of which the most profitable part was the sale of rifles and ammunition; this had the additional effect of creating close ties to a small circle of native customers.¹⁴ However, the effects of the spiritual activities of the missionaries was negligible, and even their medical efforts could not compete with those of the indigenous witch doctors.¹⁵ In 1879 Dr. Friedrich Fabri, inspector of the Rhine mission for twenty-seven years, a prolific writer in support of German imperialism, and a founder of the “West German Society for Colonization and Export”(1880),¹⁶ published a pamphlet “Does Germany Need Colonies?” that helped spark the public discussion of the pros and cons of German colonization.¹⁷ Then, “In 1882 a rather disreputable German

¹³ Helmuth Stoecker, ed., German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the Second World War, trans. from the German by Bernd Zöllner.(London: C. Hurst, and Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1986), pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ Erhard Kamphausen, “Namibia im Kolonialen Zeitalter: Weisse Herrschaft - Schwarzer Widerstand.” Entwicklungspolitische Korrespondenz: Zeitschrift zu Theorie und Praxis der Entwicklungspolitik (Hamburg), vol.8, no.5-6 (1977): pp .20-29.

¹⁵ I. Goldblatt, History of South West Africa from the beginning of the nineteenth century (Cape Town: Juta, 1971), pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ Mildred S. Wertheimer, The Pan-German League 1890-1914 (New York: Octagon Books, 1971 (© 1924)), p. 63.

¹⁷ Helmuth Stoecker, op. cit., p. 21. Hillebrecht points out that the second largest collection of materials on South West Africa - after the governmental archives in Potsdam - is the Archiv der Vereinigten Evangelischen Mission in Wuppertal (the archive of the United Evangelical Mission in Wuppertal) which includes the materials of the Rhenish Mission; see: Henning Melber, Mary Melber and Werner Hillebrecht, eds., In Treue fest, Südwest! Eine ideologiekritische Dokumentation von der Eroberung Namibias über die deutsche Fremdherrschaft bis zur Kolonialapologie der Gegenwart (Bonn: edition südliches afrika 19, 1984), pp. 187-188.

trader,”¹⁸ F. A. E. Lüderitz of Bremen, tried to establish himself in Angra Pequena, a port on the desolate west coast of Africa. He quickly discovered that instead of the instant riches that he had hoped to find he suffered large losses, and he therefore tried to sell out to any interested buyer.¹⁹ When that buyer turned out to be English, Bismarck in 1884 officially declared that the establishments of Adolf Lüderitz were under the protection of the German Empire.²⁰ Then Lüderitz founded the Company for South West Africa in 1885, but he drowned soon afterwards (in 1886).²¹ That company not only lost money, but also was “....financially unable to support a government of any kind, to explore the interior, or to control the natives. For this reason, it continually refused to accept the charter conveying sovereign rights, with which Bismarck offered again and again to invest it.”²² These charters are of particular interest because they help to explain the behaviour of German commercial enterprises in the colonies..

“The charter, or *Schutzbrief*, one of the only two which Bismarck succeeded in granting, is interesting as reflecting the plan which he was unable to carry out for all the colonies. It is extremely brief and notable for two characteristics. First, it imposed only one condition upon the company in return for the many privileges received. As if to emphasize the Chancellor’s wish that the

¹⁸ A. J. P. Taylor, Germany’s First Bid for Colonies 1884-1885: a move in Bismarck’s European Policy (Archon Books, 1967; 1st ed. 1938), p. 23.

¹⁹ On the rather byzantine relations between several companies that sought to exploit economic resources in South West Africa and the economic and diplomatic relations between Germany, Great Britain, Portugal and South Africa, see: Richard A. Voeltz, German Colonialism and the South West Africa Company, 1884-1914 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Monographs in International Studies, Africa Series Nr. 50, 1988).

²⁰ Helmuth Stoecker, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27.

²¹ Woodruff D. Smith, The German Colonial Empire (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 54.

²² Mary Evelyn Townsend, The Rise and Fall of Germany’s Colonial Empire 1884-1918 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966 (1st ed. 1930)), p. 129.

companies be as independent as possible, the charter conveyed 'all sovereign rights over the territories acquired by the company, jurisdiction over the natives and other inhabitants,' on the one proviso that the company remain German. And, in the second place, it omitted to enumerate many obligations common to the charters granted by other nations during the same period, such as the prohibition of trade monopoly, which even the English charters of the nineteenth century contained; the prohibition of slavery and sale of liquor; the duty of promoting the welfare of the natives, and the duty of building roads and harbors. These omissions may have been due to haste, to design, or to inexperience; but whatever their cause, they render the author, the Chancellor, partially responsible for the flagrant misgovernment and many abuses of which the companies were guilty.²³

In 1885 Dr. Heinrich Göring was sent out to German South West Africa as *Reichskommissar* (governor) and made protection agreements with those chiefs who could be persuaded to accept the protection of the German Emperor.²⁴ ".... Dr. Goering, (had) to take charge of the interior, since the company was only pretending to function on the coast. the company grew ever weaker Dr. Goering then extended his imperial sway over the entire protectorate, and the company's political role ceased, never to revive."²⁵

Dr. Göring's term lasted five years and is of interest here mainly because his more famous son Hermann was Hitler's *Reichsmarshall* and head of the *Luftwaffe*. Dr. Göring, a widower with five children, had made a young woman pregnant and seems to have been quite content to leave Germany for a while. He stopped in London to get married before taking up his post in South West Africa. Upon the termination of that assignment

²³ Townsend, op. cit., pp.133-134.

²⁴ John H. Wellington, South West Africa and its Human Issues (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 169.

²⁵ Townsend, op. cit., pp.129-130.

his career deteriorated to the point where he accepted

... an invitation from a castle-owning millionaire whose acquaintance the Görings had made in South West Africa and who was godfather to the Görings' second son, Hermann, to come live, rent-free, in a small castle near Nuremberg; the generous friend's undisguised use of Frau Göring as his mistress for fifteen years, during which time the adoring Hermann absorbed the godfather's passion for pseudo-medieval pomp and circumstance, and the former *Reichskommissar* consoled himself with drink, dying in 1913, one year before the outbreak of World War I and two years before the protectorate was wrested from the Germans by the Union of South Africa, in one stroke annulling everything he and his successors had accomplished, except for the killing and enslavement of whole tribes of people.²⁶

A more direct link to the nazi elite is found in the career of the scientist Eugen Fischer who in 1908 collected materials in South West Africa for his studies of the Rehoboth Bastards (persons of mixed blood, born mainly of unions between Boer men and Hottentot women). In 1927 he was named Director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics and in 1933 he became Rector of the University of Berlin. He represents the continuity between the Kaiser's colonial policy and national socialistic racial policy.²⁷ Fischer cited the Rehoboth Bastards as evidence of the potentially harmful results of "hybridization" and the need to develop "a practical eugenics - a race hygiene". In 1913 he published his results in the book The Bastards of Rehoboth and the Problem of Miscegenation in Man in which he wrote that "free competition would lead to their decline and destruction."²⁸ In 1923 Hitler read the

²⁶ Jon Swan, op. cit., p. 40.

²⁷ Volker Ullrich, op. cit.

²⁸ Benno Müller-Hill, Murderous Science: Elimination by scientific selection of Jews, Gypsies, and others, Germany 1933-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 8.

textbook by E. Baur, E. Fischer, and F. Lenz, Menschliche Erblchkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene (The Principles of Human Heredity and Race-Hygiene) while imprisoned in Landsberg, and later included racial ideas from that textbook in his own book, Mein Kampf (My Struggle). In that same text one finds the statement that "The question of the quality of our hereditary endowment is a hundred times more important than the dispute over capitalism or socialism ..."29

The local link to nazi philosophy was the theoretician Paul Rohrbach who was the head of the South West Africa Settlement Commission. He was the author of German World Politics, published in 1912 (English translation in 1915), where he developed a rationale for the extermination or expulsion of the native inhabitants of the colonies to make room for the white race.³⁰ There he also formulated the racial concepts that formed the basis for the enslavement of the natives and that later became part of the plans for the conquest of the people of Eastern Europe.³¹ Henning Melber is even more specific: he says that Rohrbach's writings became after 1933 part of the programmatic documentation of the nazi party.³²

SOME DOMESTIC SOURCES OF GERMAN RACISM

These developments did not take place in a vacuum. The racial theories of Gobineau and Chamberlain were widely read and discussed in

²⁹ As quoted in Müller-Hill, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

³⁰ Jon Swan, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

³¹ Volker Ullrich, op. cit.

³² Henning Melber, "Kontinuitäten totaler Herrschaft: Völkermord und Apartheid in 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika': Zur kolonialen Herrschaftspraxis im Deutschen Kaiserreich," pp. 91-116 in Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung 1, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1992), p. 101.

intellectual circles in Western Europe. A great variety of organizations was formed in several countries by people with social, economic, or political concerns dealing with colonization, nationalism, and racism. The newly united Germany, being a late-comer to such concerns with nationhood and empire, experienced these debates with the added virulence of those trying to catch up. One of the leaders in these debates was one of the smaller organizations that made up for its lack of size with an extraordinary amount of activity on a wide variety of topics: the Pan-German League. "The captain of the Pan-German ship was Dr. Ernst Hasse.in 1885, he became a *Privatdozent* at the University of Leipzig and in 1886, *Ausserordentlicher Professor*, teaching statistics until 1888, when he instituted a course on colonial politics, the first regular university course on the subject in Germany."³³ How widespread these concerns were among the intellectually active sectors of the population can be seen in the official Handbuch des all-deutschen Verbandes (Handbook of the Pan-German League) for 1914 which published a list of German associations and societies that contains 84 names.³⁴ They were not all equally active, but collectively they represented a considerable pressure group when the occasion arose. There exists a considerable literature on the activities of these organizations and their efforts to promote colonialism, nationalism, and racism. The Pan-German League in particular has been much written about because of its extreme and hyperactive presentation of the issues that it included in its platform. Among these was a strong anti-semitic bias³⁵ and the advocacy of strong measures for the suppression of the

³³ Mildred S. Wertheimer, op. cit., p 44.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 237-239.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 100. "....the Pan-German League continued to play an active role in the politics of the Weimar republic...." where its platform presaged

Herero in South West Africa.³⁶ Wertheimer, in a careful analysis of surviving data, also shows to what extent the membership was made up of educated middle and upper occupational groups. In 1901, for instance, 85% of the membership consisted of academics, business men, and members of the liberal professions.³⁷ Or, as Roger Chickering pointed out: “No feature of a German community more affected the vitality and shaped the character of a chapter of the Pan-German-League than did the presence of an institution of higher learning.”³⁸ It becomes clear that these groups were the targets of proselytizing theories directed at them by political parties and dedicated organizations through books, pamphlets, lectures, and meetings. By contrast, there exists very little research on how racist and colonial theories spread among those who did not read the theorists or joined these organizations.

Beginning with the enlightenment, Central and West Europeans had developed an increasing curiosity about the worlds outside their own countries. They became thus open to foreign influences that enriched their perceptions of themselves and humanity. This is an enormous topic that is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to point to the almost faddish penetration of Europe by Chinese and Japanese influences at that time. For many people this opening up of the world was brought home to them by the showing of exotic peoples at country fairs and exhibitions. The

the practices of nazi Germany. See: Roger Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914 (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 3.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 65. See pp 65-72 for additional details on membership data.

³⁸ Roger Chickering, We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German-League, 1886-1914 (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984) p. 145.

opportunity to see exotic people from different parts of the world, often in their realistically recreated villages, was a tremendous success that attracted huge crowds. A couple of illustrations will suffice: At the large Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915:

Apart from their national pavilions, many countries had also constructed native village settings There were vendors and dancing girls from 'The Streets of Cairo'; Igorrots from the Phillipines; Eskimos from northern Canada; Japanese Aborigines; Workmen from China; even 1,000 natives imported to give the massive eleven-acre Jerusalem concession its character. But most interesting of all was the living ethnological exhibit in the Hall of Anthropology which contained everything from giants from Patagonia to pygmies from Africa. In fact between 15,000 and 20,000 people actually lived on the site during the exhibition. The health of these 'people of all climes and of varying degrees of civilization from savage to enlightened' had been of some concern to the organizers but the strict enforcement of health regulations stopped any contagious diseases gaining a foothold.³⁹

Similarly, the French exhibition of 1931 included a "...North African village complete in every detail..."⁴⁰ At the same time, the traders who provided zoological gardens with animals experienced a slump during which they lost money. Noting the success of exhibiting people, they added people to their enterprise.⁴¹ Between the 1870s and 1930s it became commonplace for parents to take their children to the local zoo where they could admire real-life elephants, lions, tigers, and native tribes from several continents - all from a safe distance behind fences. Staehelin was able to trace 22 such exhibitions in the zoo in Basel, Switzerland between 1879-1935; most

³⁹ John Allwood, The Great Exhibitions (London: Studio Vista, 1977), p. 114.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴¹ Balthasar Staehelin, Völkerschauen im Zoologischen Garten Basel 1879-1935 (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1993), pp.30-32.

of these had several engagements before and after Basel in other European countries before returning to their homes.⁴² However, this fashion of classing human beings with animals was not limited to Europe. In 1906 the New York Zoological Park “exhibited a human pygmy in an enclosure in the monkey house.”⁴³ For about sixty years children absorbed this kind of unprogrammed race education with their entertainment. In a quite homogeneous society like Germany, where these children were most unlikely to ever encounter non-Germans in any other setting, these experiences must have formed a solid background for their adult attitudes towards other peoples. However, unlike in the case of the educated classes, the formation of these attitudes was not the outcome of deliberate proselytizing; rather it was the fortuitous by-product of the search for profits by animal impresarios and of the declining attendance that was producing financial difficulties for zoological gardens.

The extent to which such attitudes could become generalized toward any stranger is illustrated in South West Africa by German hostility to non-Germans that was not limited to indigenous Africans. After the ‘Herero Wars’

....the *Luderitzbuchter Zeitung* asserted that “the only gratifying feature in the census return is the fact of the large decrease in the number of foreigners in our midst.” Theoretically the German is friendly towards the Boer, colonially and commercially he regards him as an intrusive and competitive foreigner, while personally he cannot forgive him for the services he rendered the Fatherland in the subjection of the tribes from 1904 to 1908. “But for the assistance of British and Dutch Afrikanders,” writes the Special Commissioner of the *Transvaal Chronicle* of some two years ago, “it is doubtful whether the Herero War would have been settled

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 156-158.

⁴³ Helen H. Horowitz, “Animal and Man in the New York Zoological Park,” *New York History* lvi, 4 (Oct. 1975): 426- 455.

even in the long span of four years. There are Boers in the country to-day who have rendered splendid services to the Germans, but who have been treated shamefully ever since, and are now fast leaving the country Feeling between German and Boer is very strained. They do not understand each other. The German soldier envies those of another nationality who wear the Kaiser's medals for conspicuous bravery and deeds of valour on the battlefield, and to-day many an Afrikaner wears the black and white ribbon - a coveted order. The shooting of Marengo, on September 20th, 1907, by Major Elliott, of the C.M.R.- a corps, by the way, into which so many Germans would like to get - was another event which fanned the jealousy of the German officials. They had been on the track of Marengo for months. Major Elliott settled the matter in a couple of hours, and the coveted 'Kaiser Medalle' went to him instead."⁴⁴

The detailed history of German colonial administration and its application as it occurred in South West Africa can not be dealt with in this short paper. However, Bridgman's "Bibliographic Essay" provides a useful guide to the literature on that history.⁴⁵ Suffice it to say that a series of conflicts between Germans and Hereros eventually escalated in 1904 into what the German government considered its first major war since 1870. The German troops, under the command of General von Trotha, had great difficulty in dealing with the Herero and Nama resistance. This so-called Herero war lasted three years. Because the Germans victimized prisoners, women, and children, it qualifies as the first genocide of the twentieth century. For the details of these Herero wars, the major engagement at Waterberg, the actions of German General von Trotha, their genocidal aspects, the racist legislation that followed them and applied to all of the

⁴⁴ Albert F. Calvert, F.C.S., South-West Africa: during the German occupation 1884-1914 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969; ©1915), pp. 31-32.

⁴⁵ Jon M. Bridgman, The Revolt of the Hereros (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 175-177.

indigenous peoples, the reader is referred to Bley⁴⁶, Drechsler⁴⁷, Katjavivi⁴⁸, Stoecker⁴⁹, Townsend⁵⁰, or Wellington.⁵¹ These sources will provide an entry into a vast literature. Thus, Spohr's 1969 bibliography of German publications, which did not include archival sources, covered 3423 entries.⁵²

Robert Cornevin provides a pithy, though biased, summary of the trends in the literature on the German colonies in Africa. He argues that the general works on German Africa

.... may be divided into two main categories according to their date of publication. Those published before 1914 are almost all by German authors and have essentially a documentary and didactic character. They aim at instructing the metropolitan country about the economic importance of these colonies, so rapidly acquired during the course of 1884 and 1885. Those published after 1918 are written by Germans, English, French, Americans and Belgians who are all more or less biased and pass moral judgements on German colonization in Africa. From 1945 onward the communist writers of East Germany come to confirm, in works written from

⁴⁶ op. cit., as well as his paper "German South West Africa After the Conquest 1904-1914," in South West Africa: Travesty of Trust. The expert papers and findings of the International Conference on South West Africa, Oxford 23-26 March 1966, with a postscript by Iain MacGibbon on the 1966 Judgement of the International Court of Justice, ed. Ronald Segal and Ruth First (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967).

⁴⁷ Horst Drechsler, "Let Us Die Fighting": The Struggle of the Hereros and the Nama Against German Imperialism (1884-1915) trans. by Bernd Zollner. (London: Zed Press, 1980; Original German edition, Akademie-Verlag, 1966).

⁴⁸ Peter H. Katjavivi, A History of Resistance in Namibia (London: James Currey, Addis Ababa: OAU, Paris: UNESCO Press, 1988), Ch.2. "German Conquest and Namibian Resistance."

⁴⁹ op. cit.,

⁵⁰ op. cit.

⁵¹ op. cit.

⁵² Otto H. Spohr, comp., German Africana: German publications on South and South West Africa (Pretoria: State Library, 1968).

the archives in Potsdam, the charges against German colonialism published between the two wars by English and French authors, and to utter a cry of alarm against the neo-colonialism of West Germany.⁵³

We shall ignore here the work that was published before 1914 because the focus of this paper is on the revisionist denial literature that is still finding an audience to the present day.

DENIALS AFTER WORLD WAR I.

As a result of losing the war Germany also lost all of her colonies. In the terse summary by Gann and Duignan:

The war of bullets was followed by a war of books. German nationalists defended their country's record and levelled accusations against their former enemies, making a formidable though unintentional contribution to the critique of imperialism in general.⁵⁴

The first shot in this war of books was a report published by the British government that became known as the "Blue Book"⁵⁵ which produced evidence of German abuses that had not been available until the German power in South West Africa was overthrown by the South African invasion of 1915. It was only then "that official records were examined and the

⁵³ Robert Cornevin, "The Germans in Africa before 1918." Ch.12 in The History and Politics of Colonialism 1870-1914, eds. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, which is Volume 1 of Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960 (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1969) pp. 383.

⁵⁴ L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, The Rulers of German Africa 1884-1914 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), p. 223.

⁵⁵ Union of South Africa, Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and Their Treatment by Germany. Prepared in the Administrator's Office, Windhuk, South-West Africa, January 1918. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty, August 1918. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1918).

Natives were encouraged to speak freely of their experiences.”⁵⁶ The German authorities replied with a “White Book” published in 1919 that accused the “Blue Book” of being propaganda, full of falsehoods, and mainly designed to prevent the return of her colonies to Germany. It refuted what became known as Germany’s “colonial guilt” by citing events in British colonial history⁵⁷ arguing that Germany did nothing that was not also done by the other colonial powers in Africa. In defense of the “Blue Book” Wellington argued that

..... the fact remains that large parts of the ‘Blue Book’ are straightforward translations from German authors and from German official records which were captured in 1915 and were available for anyone’s inspection. Provided the translations are correct - and there has apparently been no suggestion that they were inaccurate - such statements can certainly not be classed as tendentious and lying.⁵⁸

.... the ‘White Book’ spotlights the worst events in British colonial history, alleging that they are as culpable as anything done by the Germans in South West Africa. ... but when England’s treatment of the African Boers is likened to the German treatment of the Natives of South West Africa the accusation becomes somewhat absurd in view of the fact that the Report was authorized by the two Boer leaders who had fought with England in the war against Germany and who urged at the Peace Conference the confiscation of South West Africa.⁵⁹

These two books have set the stage for a debate that is still being conducted both inside and outside of Germany. The denial literature is based on disagreements about the facts, refutations of Germany’s ‘colonial guilt’, and assertions of Germany’s right to her colonies (lately rephrased as the right to play a role in the third world). The historical literature is based

⁵⁶ John H. Wellington, op. cit., p. 231.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 236-237.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 231.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 236-237.

on additional archival documentation concerning the contested events and explorations of the linkages between German colonial history and the rise of nazism.

The “Blue Book” and the “White Book” were produced by their respective governments and represented their respective positions. However, the bulk of revisionist or denial literature is produced by individual authors. Since most twentieth century perpetrator governments are deniers, there is no disagreement between them and the individual authors. In fact, they often cooperated and reinforced each other. The major exception is the West German post-World War II government which has admitted the reality of the Holocaust.

An early broadside in defense of German colonialism was published in English by Dr. Heinrich Schnee. He wrote a book to counteract the accusation of Germany’s “colonial guilt” that, he argues, was spread by the allied powers in order to deprive Germany of her colonies after World War I.⁶⁰ According to a “Biographical Note”, Schnee already as a young man sought an education preparing him for the colonial service, including learning the “Suaheli” language.⁶¹ He rose through the ranks, became director of the Imperial Colonial Office in 1911 and was Governor of German East Africa in 1912-1919. His book demonstrated that German administration compared favourably with that of other colonial powers, how individual excesses had also occurred in other colonies but had been promptly punished in the German ones, and how early mistakes were due to a lack of experience and were equally present in other new colonial powers. He ended by stating

⁶⁰ Dr. Heinrich Schnee, German Colonization Past and Future: The Truth About The German Colonies with an Introduction by William Harbutt Dawson (pp.9-46) (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926).

⁶¹ Schnee, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

that “... Germany claims the opportunity and the right to take her part again permanently in the civilizing mission of the white races”⁶² The author, whose argument was supported in a lengthy introduction by W.H. Dawson,⁶³ dealt quite briefly with an accusation of “... three great rebellions, which were coupled with heavy loss of life to the natives ...These were the Arab revolt in German East Africa in 1888, the Maji-Maji revolt in 1905, and the Herero rebellion in German South-West Africa in 1904”⁶⁴ It is worth quoting in some detail how this author dealt with the fate of the Hereros.

In relation to the third revolt, that of the Hereros in German South-West Africa, this was occasioned through the gradual penetration of the white settlers, in whom the natives saw a menace to their continued possession of the land. In this respect it resembled the revolts with which white settlers had had to contend in North America, in Australia, and in South Africa. The Herero revolt began with a massacre of all German settlers who happened to fall into the hands of the rebels. The Herero developed unexpected powers of resistance, so that the despatch of considerable bodies of troops from Germany became necessary.

⁶² Schnee, op. cit., p.176.

⁶³ This is the same W. H. Dawson who at the request of the Foreign Office wrote German Colonization for use at the Peace Conference. He continued to support the justice of Germany's cause into the nazi period. See his letter to the Editor of The Times of November 4th, 1936 which is reprinted as pp. 95-96 in Dr. G. Kurt Johannsen and H. H. Kraft, Germany's Colonial Problem (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1937). This small book deals only with the demographic and economic effects of Germany's loss of her colonies after World War I. Dawson, in the above-cited letter, refers to many tributes of praise and admiration for Germany's colonial work, and then continues: “In the early years mistakes were made, excesses committed, and in one case a rebellion was quelled by drastic measures. But was it different with any other Colonial Power, and was the suppression of the Hereros of South-West Africa by the Germans harsher than the suppression of the Matabele and Mashonas?”

⁶⁴ Schnee, op. cit., pp.115-116.

They were defeated only after long and wearisome fighting, and it is true that a part of them fled into the sandy wastes, where they died of thirst.

The British Blue Book misrepresents the facts to such a degree as to make it appear that the Herero tribes had been persistently and cruelly oppressed by the German colonists and that the crushing of the rebellion had been a mere war of extermination. These charges have been completely refuted by the before-mentioned German White book, which, nevertheless, does not attempt to conceal the fact that at times military methods were adopted in combating the revolt *which were not sanctioned by the German Government and were formally repudiated*. These measures may be explained, if not excused, by the bitterness occasioned by the massacre of the German settlers.⁶⁵

As to the 'repudiation' by the German government, the reader need only be reminded that it was this government that sent in General von Trotha whose methods for dealing with native uprisings in China and in German East Africa had earned him a well-known reputation.

THE HITLER PERIOD

Germany's attitudes to colonies and their associated denials seem to have been quite unaffected by changes in government. The indoctrination of school children which had been continuous since the time of Imperial Germany and through the Weimar Republic was intensified during the Hitler period. Teachers were to educate their pupils in the colonial spirit, to make a special point of refuting the "myth of Germany's colonial guilt", and to glorify Germany's "colonial pioneers".⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Schnee, op. cit., 117.

⁶⁶ Jolanda Ballhaus, "The Colonial Aims and Preparations of the Hitler Regime 1933-1939." in German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the Second World War, Helmuth Stoecker, ed., trans. from the German by Bernd Zöllner (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1986), p 348.

The most popular novel of the period was published by Hans Grimm (1875-1959), who between 1897 and 1928 had been a port agent of the Ost-Afrika-Line in Africa.⁶⁷ His publishing success led him to become a journalist after his return to Germany. His novel, Volk ohne Raum (people without space), first published in 1926, advocated finding *Lebensraum* in the colonies rather than in Eastern Europe. The book became an influential bestseller and by 1935 it had sold 315,000 copies.⁶⁸ However, the slogan “Volk ohne Raum” was first coined by Foreign Minister Stresemann during an address at the Berlin Colonial Week and Exhibition held from 30 March to 8 April 1925.⁶⁹

The German Colonial Society, too, had been established long before Hitler came to power to develop plans that could be implemented as soon as the German army reoccupied its former colonies.

In 1932, the Nazi Party formally made colonial demands part of its platform when Marshall Goering, whose father had been the first Governor of Southwest Africa, opened a National Socialist colonial exhibition at Frankfurt. By 1934 the Society was a full-blown department of the Nazi Government. Hitler appointed as its chief General Franz Ritter von Epp He had helped to smash the Herero native rebellion in Southwest Africa. ... Von Epp injected new life into the colonial movement. With Nazi Party funds, he organized nearly 7,000 local groups, enrolled more than 1,000,000 members, ... Two German colonial schools were revived and several more were established.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Hans Grimm, Suchen und Hoffen: aus meinem Leben 1928 bis 1934 (Seeking and Hoping: from my life 1928 until 1934) (Lippoldsberg: Klosterhaus-Verlag, 1960), pp. 5 and 333.

⁶⁸ Woodruff D. Smith, The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 224-225.

⁶⁹ Adolf Rüger, “The Colonial Aims of the Weimar Republic” in German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the Second World War, Helmuth Stoecker, ed.; trans. from the German by Bernd Zöllner (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1986). p. 315.

Other veterans from the colonial past, in addition to von Epp and Heinrich Schnee, who joined the nazi party and occupied leading positions under Hitler, especially in the colonial movement, were: General Eduard von Liebert, former Governor of German East Africa; Duke Adolph Friedrich zu Mecklenburg; Friederich von Lindequist; and Theodor Seitz, a former governor of German South West Africa, among others.⁷¹

Thus, during the 1930s the denial literature received a strong boost from Hitler's plans for world domination; the ground for these plans was quietly being prepared through the sponsorship of nazi activities in its former colonies.⁷² For instance, Johannsen and Kraft in 1937 published a book in English in order not only to deny the accusations of Germany's "colonial guilt", but also to present arguments why its former colonies should be returned to Germany.⁷³ In 1936 Dr. Paul Leutwein, the son of the major Theodor Leutwein who had succeeded Dr. Göring as governor, wrote a book containing six biographies of Cecil Rhodes, Karl Peters, Theodor Leutwein, Lettow-Vorbeck, Menelik, and Haile Selassie. He not only celebrated his fathers career, but in the introduction also emphasized Germany's right to her colonies, refuted the lie of "colonial guilt", and advocated the timeliness of regaining her colonies peacefully through strong politics.⁷⁴ Paul Leutwein had followed his father to South West Africa in 1903 and had dedicated himself to colonial policy ever since.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Selwyn James, South of the Congo (New York: Random House, 1943), pp. 321-322. For additional details, see: Ch. 24 "Axis Plans for Africa."

⁷¹ Jolanda Ballhaus, op. cit., p.342.

⁷² Benjamin Bennett, Hitler Over Africa (London: T.Werner Laurie, 1939).

⁷³ G. Kurt Johannsen and H. H. Kraft, Germany's Colonial Problem (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1937).

⁷⁴ Dr. Paul Leutwein, ed., Kämpfe um Afrika: Sechs Lebensbilder (Lübeck: Charles Coleman, 1936).

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

Parenthetically it is worth noting that Theodor Leutwein was a quite extraordinary character whom Hugh Ridley described as “one of the most fascinating political technocrats of nineteenth-century Germany. He had a cold, logical mind, trained and sophisticated, self-assured but not over-confident, versed in Hegel and Moltke, ‘silent in seven languages’, and yet with an amazing store of political naïvety.”⁷⁶ After the end of the Herero Wars he recorded: “At a cost of several hundred millions of marks and several thousand German soldiers, of the three economic assets of the colony, mining, farming, and native labour, we have destroyed the second entirely and two-thirds of the third.”⁷⁷

DENIALS SINCE WORLD WAR II

The result of World War II was that Germany was divided into two countries. The new boundary was the result of the relative positions of the victorious armies at the end of the war and of the negotiations between the allies. This newly created boundary between the two Germanies did not imply differences in their respective populations, nor did it permit mass migration. Nevertheless, West Germany continued to emphasize its achievements in its former colonies, to deny that there had been a genocide, and to stress its destiny to spread its civilizing influence to the less developed peoples of the third world. At the same time, East Germany convinced itself, and tried to convince the rest of the world, that its citizens were anti-nazis and anti-colonialists, while all the nazi imperialists were in West Germany. Equally paradoxical, West Germany acknowledged German

⁷⁶ Helmut Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule 1894-1914 (“English edition translated, edited and prepared by Hugh Ridley”) (London: Heinemann, 1971 (1968)), pp. xiii-xiv.

⁷⁷ John H. Wellington, South West Africa and its Human Issues (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 213..

responsibility for the Holocaust, while East Germany rejected responsibility for any part of it. This is the stuff of which national myths are created!

While the hope of regaining her former colonies had to be abandoned in this post-colonial age, West German pride in the achievements of her colonial administration and in her capacity to spread its culture into the third world remained unabated. These affirmations of German successes on the colonial scene and the denials of 'German colonial guilt' were published and widely supported in West Germany.

After 1965 the situation was such that a journalist who attacked the "Koloniallegende" (the positive legend of Germany's achievements in the colonies) on TV received death threats, while someone who, while abroad, pointed out the parallels between the genocide of the Hereros and that of the Jews and the Poles had to cope with censorship threats by the foreign office. (Translated by the author.)⁷⁸

There is an additional irony in the fact that the reunited Germany has made the denial of the Holocaust a criminal offence, while the denial of the genocide in South West Africa seems to remain official policy.

One of the most elaborate denials was published in German in 1975 by Gerd Sudbolt, who had lived in South West Africa for several years and been active on the "Allgemeinen Zeitung" in Windhoek.⁷⁹ As the two Germanies were still separate countries at that time, and since the communist government of East Germany had no interest in rescuing the reputation of German imperialism, Sudbolt was denied access to the "Archiv des Reichskolonialamtes in Potsdam" where Drechsler had done the work that so undermined that reputation.⁸⁰ Ten years later Karla

⁷⁸ Helmut Bley, "Unerledigte Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte." (Unfinished German Colonial History) Entwicklungspolitische Korrespondenz: Zeitschrift zu Theorie und Praxis der Entwicklungspolitik (Hamburg) 5-6/77, pp. 2-5.

⁷⁹ Gerd Sudholt, Die deutsche Eingeborenenpolitik in Südwestafrika: Von den Anfängen bis 1904 (Hildesheim, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975).

Poewe⁸¹ published her denial in English, substantially repeating Sudbolt's arguments. His main case rested on his claim that the famous battle at Waterberg, where the Hereros broke out of a German encirclement into the desert, was in reality a major failure for the German general. However, since this was the first war fought by Wilhelmine Germany, it had to be dressed up as a victory that could be celebrated at home. Von Trotha's use of the word 'Vernichtung' (extermination) in his battle orders, he claimed, had been widely misinterpreted since it simply meant an order to break the Hereros' military ability to resist. He further tried to disprove that this was a genocide by citing the preparation of camps capable of housing 8,000 prisoners of war. Further, the number of Hereros gathered at Waterberg must have been vastly exaggerated because there simply was not enough water available there for them and their cattle; therefore the number of killed must also have been exaggerated. With respect to von Trotha's so-called "extermination order", he argued that it was issued eight weeks after the battle at Waterberg, that it was translated into the Herero language, given to prisoners before their release, and that its purpose was to discourage the attacks by small guerilla bands that had been inflicting serious losses on German troops.⁸² These arguments are repeated point by point by Poewe.⁸³

⁸⁰ Horst Drechsler, "Let Us Die Fighting": The Struggle of the Herero and the Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915) trans. by Bernd Zollner (London: Zed Press, 1980. Original German edition, Akademie-Verlag, 1966). This is the major indictment of German colonial policy, based on access to the archives in Potsdam, that has been used by a number of writers as a source of previously unavailable data.

⁸¹ Karla Poewe, The Namibian Herero: a history of their psychosocial disintegration and survival (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985)

⁸² Sudbolt, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-189.

⁸³ Poewe, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-65.

However, further publications kept appearing that documented the already well-established history of Germany's maladministration of her colonies. Many of these were based on the government archives that had been opened in Potsdam. The most important of these are the several publication by Helmut Bley, Helmuth Stoecker, and Henning Melber.

The most recent denials have been published by Gunter Spraul⁸⁴ and Brigitte Lau.⁸⁵ The latter seems a most unlikely source since she is the chief archivist of the National Archives of Namibia. Although her denial appeared in a quite obscure source, it generated a heated exchange in the London Southern African Review of Books. The first reply was by Randolph Vigne, the Honorary Secretary of the Namibia Support Committee in London, who accused Lau's arguments of being both unsound and unoriginal because they could all be found in Sudbolt, Poewe, and Spraul.⁸⁶ Lau replied by questioning the number of victims involved, emphasizing the German casualties, and arguing, *inter alia*, that the term 'genocide' is not applicable in this case.⁸⁷ This elicited a further reply by Vigne and an additional letter from Henning Melber who wrote from Kassel University in West Germany to reject any argument based on the numbers. Lau terminated the exchange with a brief note complaining about "editorial distortion of its substance by deletion and substitution" of

⁸⁴ Gunter Spraul, "Der 'Völkermord' an den Herero: Untersuchungen zu einer neuen Kontinuitätsthese." Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 12 (1988): 713-739.

⁸⁵ Brigitte Lau, "Uncertain certainties: The Herero-German war of 1904." Migabus, no. 2 (April 1989): 4-5, 8. Only two number of Migabus were published in Windhoek by an independent editorial collective. (Personal communication.)

⁸⁶ Randolph Vigne, "Shark Island" Southern African Review of Books (February/May 1990): p. 31.

⁸⁷ Brigitte Lau, Letter to the Editor, Ibid. (June/July 1990): p. 31.

a single word.⁸⁸

The level to which this debate has sunk may be indicated thus: Lau accused Vigne of citing numbers from Drechsler that, she wrote, occurred neither in Drechsler nor anywhere else; whereupon Vigne responded by citing the exact page references where Drechsler discussed his estimates of the losses suffered by the Herero and the Nama.

At this point, there is little to be added to a quote from General S. L. A. Marshall who said: "Many years ago in the course of my work as a soldier and writer, I discovered pretty much on my own that the one thing more difficult to refute than a final truth is an utter absurdity." ⁸⁹ Amen.

CONCLUSION

Recent publications have provided supporting data for Hannah Arendt's assertion about the origins of the nazi elite. They have also provided additional evidence for the importance of historical and comparative analysis. The major oversight in these recent studies is that they did not also include data on the lively and voluminous denial literature that was generated by German colonialism in general and by the genocide of the Herero in particular. That this denial literature still flourishes so long after the event, illustrates not only how memories can be manipulated, but also the crucial role such memories play in shaping national identities - as well as being shaped by them. In the case of German nationalism, a central component of these memories consists of the roots of racism and their role in shaping the myths of national identity. That some of these roots have been repressed from conscious memory adds to the challenges that face

⁸⁸ Randolph Vigne, Henning Melber, Brigitte Lau, Letters to the Editor, Ibid. (August/October 1990): p. 23.

⁸⁹ Eschel Rhoodie, South West: The last frontier in Africa (New York: Twin Circle Publ. Co., 1967), "Preface" by S. L. A. Marshall.

researchers in this area. In fact, one of the things that makes the study of nationalism so fascinating is that the memories that underlie a national identity consist both of those that continue to be celebrated, as well as of those that have been suppressed or repressed.

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MONTREAL INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES

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